



# Easier Done than Said

**Brilliance at  
the Bridge Table**

**Prakash K. Paranjape**

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## Foreword

*How does one go about making decisions at the bridge table?*

That isn't an easy question to answer. Any problem, even the simplest, can be tackled in many different ways. Suppose you want to add 10 and 10, for example. You could do a mathematical addition; you could multiply 10 by 2; you could take 10 pebbles in one jar and 10 in another, mix them, and count; you could write a computer program for getting the solution; and so on. All these approaches would probably lead you to the correct solution. As the complexity of the problem increases, however, so does the number of possible approaches.

Suppose you impose a restriction on the time allowed for solving your problem, and on the kind of the solution aids (reference books, computers, etc.) that can be used. Add an element of uncertainty. What do you get? You get the kind of situation that we face over and over again during a bridge hand! The time available to you is typically a few seconds, you have only your memory and logical skills at your disposal, and you do not know the exact position of at least twenty-six cards when you begin to play the hand. The problem could be finding your next correct bid, or finding the correct card to play to the next trick. The former is in some ways far more difficult than the latter, because it involves an understanding of various bidding systems and philosophies. Play problems are perhaps easier, but can still be very difficult to solve, given the time constraints. That's why we have so many different levels of bridge players — from novices to world masters.

What is the best way to find the right solution on a given hand? Nobody can tell you that! Most of us have read books that discuss squeezes, end-plays, entries, trump control, communications and all the other complicated plays. "Which one applies to the problem at hand?" you might start wondering the moment the dummy comes down. There isn't time enough to consider even a couple of them, let alone all, and that's not the best way to go about it anyway.

Going back to our dummy play or defense problem, what does the average player do at the start of a hand? Here is a list of some of the simple tasks he performs:

- Counts his side's tricks, and tries to spot ways of augmenting them;
- Counts the opponents' tricks, and tries to find ways of restricting them;
- Considers the obvious line of play, and tries to avoid pitfalls;
- Considers the opponents' line of attack, and attempts to stop them in their tracks.

The list is already too long. But surprisingly often, one of these four considerations puts you on the right track. What might otherwise be a difficult hand to analyze becomes a simple problem, and the solution lies in some simple maneuver that allows you to cruise along. Only after the end of the deal, perhaps, do you look back and analyze the deal and find that you have pulled off some exotic coup — a Delayed-Duck Squeeze, or a Deschappelles Coup, or some other name-brand play like that. In fact, easier done than said.

What I have done in this book is to present hands in which a brilliant play was executed by some player, and then to try to explain how it would be possible to figure it out, starting from a simple idea and following it up through to its logical conclusion. Simple themes, such as 'don't let East gain the lead', 'try to find an entry into the West hand' and so on, develop into a hand that would not disgrace a bridge column!

All the hands in this book were real, (or 'virtual' as in the ones played on the Internet), and all the plays described were actually found at the table. I witnessed many of the hands, either as one of the players at the table or as a team-mate or opponent in the other room. Many of these hands appeared in my column in the *Sunday Review*, *Times Of India*, and some in the *Canadian Master Point* magazine, but some haven't been published at all: I had saved them for this book. Also, I couldn't resist including one that appeared first in the *IBPA Bulletin*, a hand played by a young Polish woman, because the theme was exquisitely simple and fresh.

You will find that there are hands of varying degrees of difficulty here, when you analyze the problems yourself. Some of the more brilliant ones took less than a minute to play, but hours to analyze completely. Others took a much longer time on the table, but the underlying logic behind the good play was rather simple. You might be able to come up with the solution faster than the original player on

some of them. In fact, that is the motivation for my writing this book: to encourage you to develop your own personal style and method for solving bridge problems.

When presenting each solution, I have tried to describe the basic idea in simple words. That was perhaps the most difficult part of the exercise, as the title of the book indicates: we are talking about difficult-to-describe, but simple-to-execute plays. I have met some bridge experts who can't easily explain the thinking behind their good plays, although they are quite capable of producing them consistently on hand after hand. For them, it's just subconscious instinct and 'card sense'. Playing with them got me thinking about the theme 'Easier Done Than Said'.

I hope that the reader will find the book instructive, and thereby will be helped to produce his or her own 'simple brilliancies' at the table.



## Acknowledgements

In India, most people tend to equate bridge with gambling. In general, a raised eyebrow is a more likely reaction than any real appreciation when one is discovered to be a bridge player. In fact, even in the liberal environment of a nationally known educational institute, and even when the government officially recognizes bridge as an approved sport, I have had to face harassment simply because of my interest in bridge. In such an environment, keeping my interest alive has been an uphill task. Needless to say, without the active support of many, it would have been very difficult for me even to think of writing a bridge book. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge them.

To begin with, I am greatly indebted to Vivek Bhand, my regular partner for last ten years, and a very strong bridge player, who ‘supplied’ six of the well-played hands, and along with Indian Junior Team member Sandeep Thakral also helped in checking the manuscript. Vivek and I play the DEMICOMA (DEstructive MINors CONstructive Majors) system that I have developed, and which I believe is at once simple, elegant, effective, and powerful.

I am also grateful to all my friends at the Samant dairy, especially Anand Samant and Dr. Deepak Khemani for stimulating discussions, and Kanta Datar for his fresh approach to bridge solutions. Thanks are also due to P. Malani, Arun Mohta, and Vinay Somani who initiated me into the excitement of bridge in the midst of a state-level chess tournament, because they needed a fourth to play in an inter-hostel match. Yes, I started bridge directly with a duplicate match!

Actually, most of the credit for getting this book published goes to Ray and Linda Lee of Master Point Press, who made me write articles for *Canadian Master Point* magazine with timely reminders, and who suggested that I should write a book, and some credit goes to the Internet, which greatly facilitated our interaction. Similarly, I am grateful to *The Times Of India*, India’s premier daily, that has been running my Sunday bridge column for five years now.

Finally, I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude towards my parents, who don’t quite appreciate my craze for the game, but are nevertheless tolerant of it; and my wife Shubhada, who does appreciate it — after all, she has a university gold medal in Statistics, and conveniently believes that I am working in Applied Statistics!



# Contents

|                                    |           |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| <i>Foreword</i>                    | iii       |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>            | vii       |
| <br>                               |           |
| <i>Chapter One    Technique</i>    | <i>11</i> |
| Fear is the Key                    | 13        |
| Simple Squeeze                     | 15        |
| Visionary Play                     | 17        |
| Picking-up Trumps Effortlessly     | 19        |
| Perserverance Paid                 | 21        |
| Unplanned Squeeze                  | 24        |
| Path of Lesser Resistance          | 27        |
| Ensuring Twelve Tricks             | 31        |
| An Automatic Trump Coup            | 33        |
| Utilizing Spots                    | 35        |
| King Needed Off-side               | 37        |
| Show-up End-play                   | 39        |
| A Mathematician Simplifies         | 41        |
| Telescoping Losers                 | 44        |
| An Incredible Swing                | 47        |
| <br>                               |           |
| <i>Chapter Two    Card Reading</i> | <i>51</i> |
| Honor the Count                    | 53        |
| An Open-book Problem               | 55        |
| You Can Use Opponents' Signals     | 57        |
| Efficient Operation                | 59        |
| Accurate Opponent Reading          | 61        |
| Easy Mind Reading                  | 64        |
| Altered Percentages                | 67        |
| Staying Alive                      | 70        |
| The Giveaway Opening               | 73        |

|                      |                                 |     |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Chapter Three</i> | <i>Defense</i>                  | 77  |
|                      | Avoiding Responsibility         | 79  |
|                      | Garbling the Winning Sequence   | 82  |
|                      | Stranded                        | 85  |
|                      | Weight Reduction                | 87  |
|                      | Authorized Information          | 90  |
|                      | Yogic Defense                   | 93  |
|                      | The Missing Points              | 97  |
|                      | Reliable Partner                | 99  |
|                      | Unexpected Benefit              | 101 |
|                      | The Information Trap            | 103 |
| <br>                 |                                 |     |
| <i>Chapter Four</i>  | <i>Advanced Ideas</i>           | 107 |
|                      | Expert Sponsor's Smooth Defense | 109 |
|                      | Encouraging the Opponents       | 111 |
|                      | Forcing Suicide                 | 113 |
|                      | The Ambithermal Contract        | 116 |
|                      | In Lieu of a Cross-ruff         | 119 |
|                      | Only Chance                     | 121 |
|                      | Necessary Suspense              | 123 |
|                      | Table Perfect                   | 125 |



CHAPTER ONE



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# Technique

*We shall begin our journey through the world of 'easy' bridge plays with some really simple examples that can crudely be classified as 'merely' technical plays, and proceed gradually towards 'not so simple' ones. As you begin to learn how to approach these problems, you might eventually find that the fifth or last hand is the easiest of them all. I would, in fact, like you to think that all of them are easy...*

*Squeeze, safety play, elopement, trump coup, avoidance play and so on; every bridge player has heard these terms, even if they've never knowingly executed such a maneuver at the table. Such terms all describe techniques that can be found in advanced books on play. The fact that there exist simpler card-play techniques, which one never talks about in expert discussions, yet which form the backbone of good card-play, is often overlooked. In some situations, doing the simple things will automatically guide declarer into following a line that eventually involves an advanced maneuver, whether he is conscious of what is happening or not. There is no card-reading involved, and there is minimal planning needed. The declarer just follows some basic principles and as he moves along, a technical play unfolds...*

*Perhaps the best way to learn an advanced card-play technique is by examining this kind of hand. As the way to execute a maneuver becomes clearer, you will become more confident about using it yourself.*

## Fear is the Key

On the following hand, Abhay Todankar, who had started playing bridge just a few tournaments before, opened 1NT as South and partner raised to 3NT. West led the ♣Q, and East followed with ♣J.

North-South vul.

| W    | N   | E    | S    |
|------|-----|------|------|
|      |     |      | 1NT  |
| pass | 3NT | pass | pass |
| pass |     |      |      |

♠ K 5 4  
 ♥ A J 6  
 ♦ 9 8 4 3  
 ♣ A 8 6

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|   | N |   |
| W |   | E |
|   | S |   |

♠ A 10 3  
 ♥ K 3 2  
 ♦ A Q 7 6 5  
 ♣ 5 4

Abhay won the ♣A on the third round, East following to all three clubs, and took stock of the situation. Obviously, West had led the ♣Q from ♣KQ10 with length and would be in a position to cash his club winners if he got in. The diamonds had to come home for the contract to succeed: a 2-2 diamond break with ♦K on-side would see him through. If the diamond finesse lost, however, West would run his master clubs.

*Was there a way for declarer to improve his chances?*

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**NORTH**

♠ Q J 10 6 5  
 ♥ 4 2  
 ♦ 5 3 2  
 ♣ 10 8 4

**SOUTH**

♠ —  
 ♥ A K 7 5 3  
 ♦ A 4  
 ♣ A K Q 6 3 2

Can you find a way to make 5♣ on the lead of the ♠A? East has a doubleton heart and ♣J95. See page 28 for the solution.

If you think that the kind of elegant and simple play that the declarer found on this hand is beyond you, you need this book! Study the hands in this book, all of which are taken from actual club and tournament play, and you'll see how the logic of each situation leads to a play that is "easier done than said." Then apply these ideas to your own game! Amaze your partners. Mystify your opponents. Play better bridge.



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